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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the need to extend a variety of academic and student support services to its adult and commuting students, East Tennessee State University initiated a Center for Adult Programs and Services. The center, a collaborative effort of the Divisions of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, offers a broad array of programs and services to nontraditional students in a convenient and highly accessible setting. Programs and services include community outreach, admissions, academic advisement and registration services, adult orientation and peer support programs, information and personalized referral, faculty/staff development programs, and a variety of student assistance services for both the adult learner and commuting student. Approximately 1,000 student visits to the center are recorded each week, one measure of its success during its first two years of operation. Support services are provided primarily by student workers under the direction of professional staff with a modest operating budget from student activities funds. The program has shown that improvement and expansion of special support services for nontraditional students can be achieved with a modest commitment of university resources by reorganizing services that are currently available within the university and adding support services requiring modest financial support. (Author)

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SERVICES FOR ADULT & COMMUTING STUDENTS

CENTER FOR ADULT PROGRAMS & SERVICES

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

STARTING DATE: SEPTEMBER 17, 1987

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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

Center for Adult Programs and Services

East Tennessee State University

ABSTRACT

Recognizing the need for extending a variety of academic and student support services to its adult and commuting students, East Tennessee State University initiated a Center for Adult Programs and Services. The Center, a collaborative effort between the Divisions of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, offers a broad array of programs and services to non-traditional students in a convenient and highly accessible setting. Programs and services include: community outreach, admissions, academic advisement and registration services, adult orientation and peer support programs, information and personalized referral, faculty/staff development programs, and a variety of student assistance services for both the adult learner and commuting student. Approximately 1000 student visits to the Center are recorded each week, one measure of the Center's success during its first two years of operation. Support services are provided primarily by student workers under the direction of professional staff with a modest operating budget from student activities funds. Improvement and expansion of special support services for non-traditional students can be achieved with a modest commitment of university resources by reorganizing services that are currently available within the university and adding additional support services requiring modest financial support.

Center for Adult Programs and Services

East Tennessee State University

Introduction

Like many other universities during the past decade, East Tennessee State University has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of non-traditional students, both adult students and other non-traditional students such as commuters. In an effort to enhance the university experience of these students, ETSU created the Center for Adult Programs and Services which opened during the fall of 1987. Student response to the new Center has been overwhelming, with the Center currently experiencing over 1,000 student visits per week. Designed to give students convenient access to needed services, the Center provides a focal point for information, assistance and support for these student groups.

The Office of Evening and Summer School in the Center accepts applications for admission and provides advisement and registration services for evening students and for adult day students during their first year on campus. Student Affairs offers a wide variety of support services ranging from information and referral to student advocacy.

The two-year experience of the Center provides evidence that, with minimal allocation of resources, the university can respond effectively to the special needs and interests of these student groups.

Background

In response to the increasing numbers of adult students returning to school, East Tennessee State University created the Center for Adult Programs and Services (CAPS) in the fall semester of 1987. At this time 39% of ETSU's student population are 23 or older. The Center represents a joint venture by the Division of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs to provide a wide range of academic and support services to adult and other "non-traditional" students. Recognizing the special needs of these students, the Center endeavors to promote the recruitment and retention of these students by offering convenient access to the many services of the university and of the community in which the university is located. In addition, the Center is in a unique position to serve not only individual students, but to increase the responsiveness of the institution to the needs of these groups.

Description

Student services in the Center for Adult Programs and Services focus on the special needs of older students who are returning to school after an absence of three or more years and who have typically multiple responsibilities in addition to school. The Center offers a variety of programs and services to assist these non-traditional students. These include:

Specialized admissions, registration, fee payment and advisement services for all entering adult students for

their first three semesters on campus, and for all evening and summer transient students during their entire enrollment period;

"Begin Again", a program for adults in the community who are considering a return to school;

Adult Orientation programs for entering adult students (first time, readmission and transfers);

Peer support programs which link entering students with "successful" adult students who volunteer to support, encourage and advise the nervous "newcomer" during the transition to university life;

Information and personalized referral services, including a telephone hot-line, which connect students with needed services in the university and community;

Publications designed for the adult student: a re-entry manual, newsletter distributed each semester, updates mailed twice each semester, and a Survival Manual listing frequently needed information about university and community resources;

Lunch bag seminars (approximately 10 per semester) on topics of interest to adult learners, with topics ranging from test-taking skills to spending "quality time" with your children;

Commuter services: ride-sharing (system to help locate another student for carpooling), priority (reserved) parking for officially recognized carpools, transit information, and battery cables for loan to students;

Off-campus housing information (providing listing of units available) and a roommate search system;

Child-care information and services: Child-care co-op, lists and information about ETSU students who babysit, and the local department of human services listing of area day-care centers;

Emergency locator service designed to locate adult students on campus in case of an emergency at home, work or at children school;

Stage II, an adult student organization, which serves as an "official voice" for ETSU's adult students and plans special events for them and their families; and

A fully equipped lounge with microwave oven, refrigerator, and coffee maker where students can relax, study or visit.

In addition, the Center recently conducted an assessment of faculty staff learning needs and provided a one-day workshop for 85 faculty and staff. This faculty development effort resulted in the creation of a campus-wide network of individuals committed to improving the institution's efforts to assist adult students, e.g., one outcome has been the formation of ad hoc student/faculty/staff groups who are exploring the feasibility of a day care center and development of additional sources of support for financial assistance. The workshop also resulted in the development of a report identifying institutional problems, priorities, and suggestions for addressing them. Serving as an advocate for adult students, both collectively and individually, the Center has provided a needed feedback loop which has facilitated the university's ability to respond more effectively to the needs of its adult students.

Student support services are provided by a staff which consists of a full-time director, an office manager (full-time), a part-time secretary (30 hrs./week) and eight student workers (10 hrs./week each). An annual operating budget of approximately $25,000 is provided through a student activities allocation by a university standing committee composed of faculty and students. The Office of Evening and Summer School, which in the Center receives separate funding, is open year round from 7:30 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday and 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on Fridays in order to provide convenient access for both day and evening students.

Results:

The rapid growth in student clientele using Center services is the most obvious indicator of program effectiveness. During the first year of operation, use of the academic advisement and registration services increased forty five percent (45%), with a sixty eight percent (68%) increase in fee payments processed. Growth in use of student support services has also been dramatic, increasing to over 1,000 student contacts per week (approximate headcount 560 individual students per week). Approximately 10% of these students have been referred to the Center by faculty and staff for assistance with specific problems.

Two types of data indicate the effectiveness of the new Center...utilization of Center services (headcount, student contacts, and referrals by faculty staff) and results of an evaluation survey conducted by the adult student organnization

in the fall of 1988. The survey, completed by 164 of the students visiting the Center during a one week period, revealed that they felt the most helpful services included: lounge/kitchen facilities, information and referral services, transportation services, and registration services. In response to an open-ended item requesting comments and suggestions 84% of the respondents volunteered that they had found the staff very helpful. Forty percent (40 %) indicated a need for longer hours and additional space in the student lounge. Overall, students rated their satisfaction with services and programs as 4.45 on a scale of 5 with responses ranging from 3 (helpful, 15% responded) to extremely helpful (61%).

Faculty and staff attending the "Understanding the Adult Learner" workshop also evaluated it highly. A survey of a small sample (N = 10) of adult students taken by a fellow student for a journalism class, after the Center had been in operation for one year, was gratifying. Of the ten students interviewed, two stated that the Center had been instrumental in keeping them in school, six others indicated that they felt that the Center had provided them with valuable assistance (not the least of which was making them feel that they were a "real part" of the university), and the other two were not aware of the existence of the Center or its services.

To summarize, indicators of program effectiveness including student utilization, referrals by faculty and staff, surveys, and informal feedback suggest that the Center for Adult Programs and Services has proved highly successful in serving the adult learner and the commuting student.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Data from a variety of sources suggests that the Center for Adult Programs and Services has been exceedingly successful in the provision of services to adult and commuting students. Started in 1987, the annual operating budget for the provision of student services (not including salaries of professional staff or operation of the Office of Evening and Summer School) has been increased from $17,500 to $25,000 in order to respond effectively to dramatically increased student utilization, and an additional staff position (office manager) has been obtained. Begin Again and Adult Orientations are budgeted separately at a cost of approximately $4,000. Rapid growth in clientele and staff has resulted in an acute need for additonal space for lounge, an additional small office, and storage.

The experience in the Center for Adult Programs and Services suggests that universities can respond effectively to the special needs of adult and commuting students in a cost-effective fashion through a reorganization and/or expansion of existing services, offered in an accessible and informal setting. Particularly noteworthy are the Center's attempts to meet the students' needs for convenience, for providing students with an opportunity to form both formal and informal peer support networks, and creating an opportunity for the student to "connect" with the university in a meaningful way (e.g. volunteer service in adult-to-adult programs). More importantly, perhaps, the centralization of services for the adult learner offers considerable potential for the representation of their needs and interests to the larger academic community.